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SUBJECT: SARKOZY DISCUSSES NUCLEAR COOPERATION AND  
SYRIA/HAMAS DURING QATAR VISIT

Classified By: CDA Michael A. Ratney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) French President Nicolas Sarkozy visited Qatar January 14-15, accompanied by Defense Minister Herve Morin, Economy Minister Christine Lagarde and 20 French executives as part of his regional tour aimed primarily at bolstering French business ties with Gulf states. According to the French DCM in Doha, however, political issues also figured in Sarkozy's meeting with the Amir. The French DCM told charge that the Amir pressed Sarkozy on the need to engage with, and not isolate, Syria. The Amir reportedly said that the alternatives to the Asad regime are worse, and that it is important to think not only of the current Syrian government, but the future one. Sarkozy reportedly responded that he had been very patient with the Syrians, but his patience was exhausted. The Amir likewise pressed Sarkozy on Hamas, urging him to consider that Hamas was part of the social fabric of Palestinian society, that they had participated in elections and won, and that that any attempt to reach a settlement that isolated Hamas was doomed to failure. The French DCM (who was not in the meeting) said he did not believe Sarkozy was moved by the Amir's arguments.

¶2. (SBU) The economic highlight of the trip was the signing of a USD 695 million contract between Areva Transportation and Distribution, a subsidiary of French nuclear power group Areva, and Qatar's state electricity company Kahrama for the supply of electrical sub-stations throughout Qatar. Sarkozy also reportedly discussed with Qatari officials a series of other agreements potentially worth USD 9.3 billion. Qatar Petroleum International (QPI), the overseas subsidiary of Qatar's state-owned energy company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Gaz de France for joint international projects outside of Qatar, particularly gas projects in Europe. Gaz de France recently opened an office in Doha, after signing a liquefied natural gas (LNG) agreement with RasGas in 2007, and has been pre-qualified by QP to participate in bidding for offshore blocks in Qatar.

¶3. (C) During the visit, Electricite de France (EDF) signed an MOU with Qatar to "discuss cooperation in the production of nuclear power and renewable -- solar and wind -- energies." French Economic-Commercial Counselor Charles Couffin told Econoff January 16 that EDF will probably conduct a nuclear power feasibility study for Qatar but cooperation is intended to help the Qataris think through the idea of building a nuclear reactor, along with all the power-grid connection, implementation and security problems that nuclear power would inevitably present. He also noted that EDF might at some point conduct an environmental impact assessment for a reactor, though Qatar was "far from a decision" on deciding to pursue nuclear power.

14. (C) COMMENT: If the French DCM's account is accurate, Sarkozy held firm on two key issues near and dear to the Amir. Meanwhile, business and trade ties between Qatar and France are already strong and the personal attention of President Sarkozy gives French companies an added boost in closing energy deals with Qatar. A number of contacts have told us of Qatar's growing interest in nuclear power and nuclear technology, particularly in the medical field. However, Qatar is still at an early stage of considering anything nuclear-related, and its leaders have yet to conceptualize a broad vision for taking advantage of nuclear power or technology. Given the Amir's desire to look beyond Qatar's current hydrocarbon reserves, however, we have no doubt that Qatar will increasingly focus on reaping the benefits of nuclear technology.

RATNEY